



Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

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1. Trumpeter Swans on the Move – by Joe Wilkinson [Hold until Dec. 22]
2. New Financial Incentives Available for Planting Bottomland Trees
3. Des Moines River Agreement Signed Between Iowa and Missouri

[Hold until Dec. 22]

TRUMPETER SWANS ON THE MOVE

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

For a moment, it was white on white. Then, the trumpeter swans' features emerged; the black bills, the webbed feet and the silhouettes, set apart from the fresh layer of snow. This mostly frozen pond, in West Bend, was home for them and this pair seemed to adjust pretty easily to 'empty nest' syndrome.

Their three young had just been plucked out of their holding pen at the Grotto of the Redemption. Mom and Pop did their best; hissing, honking and beating their wings as Dave Hoffman scooped up the six-month old cygnets one at a time and loaded them into large portable kennels for relocation. "They will get bands and collars and will be placed at our captive holding site with other young swans for the winter," explained Hoffman, from the Department of Natural Resources wildlife bureau. "Their wings are clipped now. As their feathers grow back, they will be released into the wild." The oversized ugly ducklings will be transformed into 30-pound beauties by then; snow white, with eight-foot wingspans and the melodic horn-like call that spawns their name.

They join the growing flock of swans that now call Iowa home. Barely over a decade ago, there were none in Iowa. A few decades before that, there were virtually none in the continental U.S. A flock of 69 in Colorado and an occasional migrant down from Alaska or Canada was about it in the lower 48. Now, these magnificent wetland giants are found throughout Iowa and the Midwest. Winter cold ices down many areas that hold them through the warmer months, so the young, to-be-released birds, as well as flightless adults (sporting clipped wings or disabled and unable to survive in the wild), are moved around to a couple dozen sites.

There are also winter havens with free flying birds, kept in Iowa with aerators for open water and food through the cold months. Most of those areas are overseen by local volunteers, with the DNR providing the food and equipment.

“It is a bonus to see such a large group. For instance, we have 22 near Atlantic and 74 west of Webster City,” relates Hoffman. “We wouldn’t be able to do this without the cooperators.” Trumpeter swan viewing days are set for this winter, similar to Bald Eagle viewing events that are still held around the state each winter.

The winter shuttle service, meanwhile, is fueled by the growing number of wild swan nests in Iowa. The first was documented in 1998, in the fifth year of Iowa’s restoration program. From there, it has literally taken wing. From 15 in 2004, it grew to 23 wild nesting pairs this past season. The restoration program is geared toward young, relocated swans imprinting on their new area as home as they begin flying. When they mature, the imprint hopefully steers them back home.

That is the long term plan for these purloined cygnets on this day. First, though, two of the young swans treated about 70 pre-K through second graders to an up close show and tell day. “I learned they have ears, even though you can’t see them,” volunteered eight-year-old Nolan Grimm. “They’re behind the eyes.” Each of the kids stood in line for a chance to stroke the silky soft feathers. “They had some really good questions like what keeps them warm, how big do they get”, recalls Hoffman. “They get a kick out of looking at the webbing on the feet. They just love to see a big white bird that is nearly as big as they are, with an eight-foot wingspan.”

And with the swan boom beginning to take off, those Big Birds will be around for a long time.

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NEW FINANCIAL INCENTIVES AVAILABLE FOR PLANTING BOTTOMLAND TREES

New financial incentives are now available to assist landowners with converting flood prone bottomland crop fields to trees. The Iowa Division of Soil Conservation (DSC) has announced they will provide an additional 25 percent cost share to landowners who utilize the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program’s Bottomland Hardwood Tree Initiative to plant trees.

DSC is setting aside \$250,000 for this incentive, which is available to landowners on a first come, first serve basis. This incentive is in addition to the \$100 sign-up incentive already being offered by DSC.

“These new incentives are really great news for Iowa landowners. When combined with the 50 percent cost-share available from the Farm Service Agency a

landowner's out-of pocket expense for first year tree planting projects will be \$50 an acre or less," said Paul Tauke, supervisor with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources forestry bureau.

Tauke added that the timing of this announcement was good because the Farm Service Agency has just announced that soil rental rates have changed and that most soil rental rates will be increasing. "The good news for landowners is that they are eligible for a higher annual land rental payments and higher cost-share incentives," Tauke said.

To qualify for the Conservation Reserve Bottomland Hardwood Initiative, a landowner must own cropland that is within the 100-year flood plain of a river or stream. If the property qualifies for the program, landowners receive 50 percent cost-share for the establishment of trees plus an annual payment for 14 to 15 years from the Farm Service Agency and 25 percent cost share plus a \$100 per acre sign-up bonus from the Iowa Division of Soil Conservation.

For more general information on the Bottomland Hardwood Initiative go to www.iowatreeplanting.com, or contact Forestry Supervisor, Paul Tauke at 515/242-6898 or paul.tauke@dnr.state.ia.us.

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DES MOINES RIVER AGREEMENT SIGNED BY IOWA AND MISSOURI

DES MOINES - Fish and wildlife officials in Iowa and Missouri have signed an agreement effective Jan. 1, 2006, that allows residents from either state possessing a valid sport fishing license issued by either state to fish the Des Moines River and its backwaters and oxbows bordered by either state. But the agreement does not allow fishing from the shore, or attaching any device or equipment to the bank, in the state which the angler is not licensed.

Sport fishing license or permit holders must comply with the regulations of the state in whose waters they are fishing and, when fishing in waters in which they are not licensed to fish, shall comply with the most restrictive of the two state's regulations. These privileges and provisions extend to persons legally exempted from the license requirement of either state.

Iowa has similar agreements with all other border states with regards to fishing shared waters.

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